University Press of Colorado

Utah State University Press

Chapter Title: Disney's Enchanted: Patriarchal Backlash and Nostalgia in a Fairy Tale Film

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Book Title: Fairy Tale Films

Book Subtitle: Visions of Ambiguity

Book Editor(s): Pauline Greenhill and Sidney Eve Matrix

Published by: University Press of Colorado; Utah State University Press

Stable URL: http://www.jstor.com/stable/j.ctt4cgn37.12

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Disney's *Enchanted*

Patriarchal Backlash and Nostalgia in a Fairy Tale Film

Linda Pershing with Lisa Gablehouse

> *Everything still encourages the young girl to expect fortune and happiness from some Prince Charming, rather than to attempt by herself their difficult and uncertain conquest.*
>
> Simone de Beauvoir, 1953 (126)

Walt Disney Studios promoted their movie *Enchanted* (directed by Kevin Lima, 2007) as a celebratory self-parody of their classic fairy tale films, including *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (directed by David Hand, 1937), *Cinderella* (directed by Clyde Geronimi, Wilfred Jackson, and Hamilton Luske, 1950), and *Sleeping Beauty* (directed by Clyde Geronimi, 1959). Extensive advertising touted *Enchanted* as a musical comedy that pokes fun at the conventional damsels in distress, the villains seeking to destroy them, and their manly rescuers, all presented in the context of a contemporary story line.[1] We contend that the film reinforces previous Disney fairy tale ideologies, including attitudes critiqued by Simone de Beauvoir more than fifty years ago. Rather than offering an updated perspective, *Enchanted* appropriates and reworks folk and fairy tale motifs to support a conventional Euro-North American worldview that both obfuscates and reinforces patriarchal ideologies. Like other Disney movies, *Enchanted* is

1 Cristina Bacchilega and John Rieder, in this volume, draw attention to the film's structuring of "a passage between a fairy tale world and a realistic one" and explore the way it "exploits the two worlds' differences to comic effect as a kind of metacommentary on the suppression of realism in earlier Disney productions."

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not just a vehicle for generating corporate profits; it sustains the cultural ideology that has shaped Disney fairy tale films from the beginning.

Enchanted typifies Disney fairy tale films in at least two ways—its representation of women, and its sociocultural perspective. Thus, in this film, the female protagonist seeks personal fulfillment through romance. The outcome—a happy ending in marriage—follows the heroine being subjected to a threat or danger, rendered vulnerable, and finally rescued. By no means a self-actualized feminist, *Enchanted*'s main character Giselle (Amy Adams) finds her one true love and becomes a heteronormative role model for her future stepdaughter. Nancy (Idina Menzel), her hitherto feminist counterpart and rival for the affections of the lawyerly—if not princely—Robert (Patrick Dempsey), retreats at the film's end from the real world to the make-believe realm of Andalasia, giving up her professional career to become a fairy tale princess and bride. Her enemy, Narissa (Susan Sarandon), is her prospective mother-in-law, an evil witch lusting for power. Further, the film offers a worldview built on patriarchal, capitalistic, heterosexist, and racist assumptions.[2] Two scenarios set the stage for our analysis.

Scenario one comes from *Enchanted.* It is morning, and a beautiful young woman named Giselle awakens in a Manhattan apartment. Robert, a handsome divorcé, and his six-year-old daughter, Morgan (Rachel Covey), gave her lodging the previous night, when they found her lost and wandering in New York City. Having fallen through a magical portal in her fairy tale homeland of Andalasia, she has no idea where she is or how to function in the "real world." Nevertheless, Giselle notices that the apartment is a mess; clothes and newspapers are scattered everywhere, and dirty dishes fill the kitchen sink and counters. In a parody of Disney's heroines Snow White and Cinderella, who call on their animal friends to assist with chores, Giselle summons hundreds of city animals (pigeons, rats, and cockroaches) to come to the rescue. While dancing and singing the (Oscar-nominated) "Happy Working Song"—with lyrics that include "We adore each filthy chore"—Giselle and the animals scrub the place from top to bottom. When everything is spotless, she rhetorically questions, "Now, wasn't this fun?" The scenario raises a number of issues. Giselle cleans the apartment of a complete stranger, a man she met in the streets of New York City and in whose home she slept without any concern for her safety. Apparently he is

2 To the list of problems and exclusions offered by Robyn McCallum and John Stephens (n.d.), we have added heterosexism and racism.

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unable to do his own cleaning, and despite being an attorney employed by a major Manhattan law firm, he cannot manage to hire a housekeeper.

Scenario two occurs on November 23, 2007, in Hollywood, California. We join the crowd of a thousand people leaving the El Capitan, a classic theatre that has been purchased by the Disney Corporation. After shelling out eighteen dollars each for a ticket (the good seats were thirty dollars) and watching the movie, we are herded into "Disney's *Enchanted* Experience," an enormous white tent behind the theater where a banner tells viewers to "meet all your favorite Disney Princesses together under one roof" (El Capitan Theatre 2007).[3] The place is awash with pink and pastels, Disney music, and twinkling lights. We encounter a regal ballroom movie set, complete with young women dressed like Sleeping Beauty, Belle, and Cinderella, who smile while posing for photos. On another stage, we see Snow White, Ariel from *The Little Mermaid* (directed by Ron Clements and John Musker, 1989), and Jasmine from *Aladdin* (directed by Ron Clements and John Musker, 1992), wearing slightly darker makeup than the other princesses. Mulan and Pocahontas are nowhere to be found. But dressed in her big white wedding gown, a Giselle look-alike draws an especially long line of young girls, who wait to have their photos taken with her. One precious three-year-old wears a silver tiara and oversized white wedding dress. Her mother appears to be Asian, perhaps Filipina. When it's her daughter's turn to meet Giselle, the woman coaxes the child to pose and smile. The tiny bride's brown skin and dark eyes contrast sharply with the light complexions of the Disney royal court.

Princess land is all consuming. In one area, girls sit in front of mirrors and have "princess makeup" applied. The five young women of color who staff the booth have full figures that do not conform to those of the princess images surrounding them. Another area offers fancy gowns in varying colors and sizes. Girls try them on and pose in front of blue screens so that computers can superimpose background scenes from Disney movies, literally embedding them as consumers. One employee photographer says she has taken a thousand photos in a single session. The sessions follow five screenings per day. Our heads ache by the time we leave, overcome by the pink chiffon and refrains of "someday my prince will come."

3 For a discussion of the conventional depiction of fairy tale princesses, see Ming-Hsun Lin's chapter in this volume.

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Dis-Enchanting Disney's Corporate Capitalism

> *We have no obligation to make art. We have no obligation to make a statement. To make money is our only objective.*
>
> Michael Eisner, CEO of Walt Disney Corporation,
> 1981 staff memo (quoted in Wasko 2001, 29)

Although Eisner clearly expressed Disney's capitalist mandate, numerous scholars have gone further by examining the company's pervasive, multi-billion-dollar brand name and exploring the dimensions of Disney's capitalist ideology.[4] Like so many of its predecessors, *Enchanted* quickly became a box-office success. With few exceptions, critics reviewed the movie positively (Reviews of *Enchanted* 2007). It was nominated for eighteen awards, including two Golden Globes and three Academy Awards, and it received the prize for best family film at the Critics Choice Awards.[5] Ticket sales over the Thanksgiving 2007 holiday, shortly after it was released in the U.S., were $49.1 million, $7 million more than even Disney projected (Bowles 2007). Distributed to more than fifty countries and territories around the world, by April 2008, *Enchanted* had earned a total of more than $127 million in the U.S. and $340 million globally, making it the fifteenth-highest-grossing film released in 2007 (*Enchanted* Box Office Earnings 2007).

Princesses have been the fastest-growing product brand for Disney in recent years, with marketing strategies to attract females—infants to adults—as consumers of its merchandise.[6] Gary Strauss comments, "Disney,

4 See, for example, Ayres (2003b); Eliot (1993); Fjellman (1992); Giroux (1999 and 2009); Grover (1991); Schickel (1968); Smoodin (1994); Wasko (2001); and Watts (1997).

5 A list of awards that *Enchanted* received, or for which it was nominated, is available at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/*Enchanted*_%28film%29#Awards. These include winning the best live-action family film award from the Phoenix Film Critics Society; being named best family film at the thirteenth Critics Choice Awards; and garnering three Saturn Awards (best fantasy film, best actress for Amy Adams, and best music for Alan Menken).

6 For a discussion of this phenomenon, see Marr (2007). In their chapter in this collection, Bacchilega and Rieder note that Disney has successfully used the fairy tale genre to "peddle its franchise byproducts by inculcating the desire to possess their 'magic'" on women and little girls especially. Naarah Sawers in this volume suggests that "child audiences of films based on the Disney model are . . . considered primarily consumers, and thus the . . . filmic [narrative] represents a conflation of pleasure and consumption."

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the undisputed leader in princess merchandising, made a major move on the market in 2000, when it decided to package 'princesses' Snow White, Sleeping Beauty, Ariel, Belle, Cinderella, Jasmine, Mulan and Pocahontas under the same marketing umbrella. The move spawned a sales juggernaut. Disney and 300 licensees sell 25,000 princess-themed products" (2004). By 2007 Disney's princess franchise was bringing in $4.6 billion. According to Dick Cook, chair of Walt Disney Studios, one goal in developing *Enchanted* was to create a new franchise by adding Giselle to the inventory of Disney princesses and reinvigorating the sales of her earlier counterparts. However, when company executives realized the cost of securing lifelong rights to the image of Amy Adams, who plays Giselle, they abandoned the plan. As a result, although Giselle is not officially marketed as one of the Disney princesses, *Enchanted* merchandise is available in a variety of venues, with Giselle's animated (rather than actor Amy Adams's) likeness on all the products (Marr 2007).[7]

Toys and movies are only part of Disney's marketing strategy. In their essay in this collection, Cristina Bacchilega and John Rieder suggest that "the ball, the wedding, and the other make-believe scenarios naturalize the appeal of fantasy and display the power of magic for sale in the contemporary world." Thus, for example, Chrys Ingraham notes that, beginning in 1997, Disney became a key player in the wedding industry by selling the idea of "fairy tale weddings" through its media and merchandising and later producing actual weddings at its theme parks and properties (2008, 87–89; see also Jacobs 2001).[8] Ingraham focuses specifically on Disney in her analysis of "the wedding-industrial complex," the social and economic systems

7 A Giselle look-alike led the 2007 Hollywood Holly-Day Parade at Disney's Hollywood Studios *(Enchanted*'s Princess Giselle Debuts 2007). She was also featured, along with Cinderella, Snow White, Belle, and other Disney princesses, in the 2007 Walt Disney World Christmas Day Parade in the Magic Kingdom. Its unwillingness to pay Adams for the rights to her image has not stopped Disney from marketing *Enchanted* products. On Disneyshopping.com, consumers can purchase clothing, tiaras, Game Boy products, and figurines (including an Armani rendition of Giselle for $450) marketed under the *Enchanted* label. Products relating to the other Disney princesses are listed under their names.

8 Rana Dogar reports that Disney's "ultimate fairy tale wedding," which allows couples to reserve time in the Magic Kingdom, became available to purchase in 1997. For a hundred thousand dollars, the bride could buy the opportunity to ride down Main Street in a glass carriage drawn by six white horses, greeted by uniformed trumpeters. Her prince—the groom—would ride to the wedding on a white stallion (1997; see also Ingraham 2008, 87–89).

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through which the massive wedding industry reasserts heterosexual dominance and promotes women's oppression in capitalist societies.[9] Examining the ways in which Disney movies, television shows, toys, and theme parks promote weddings, Ingraham observes that the prevailing standard represents the bride as a princess—white, thin, rich, privileged, and heterosexual—who uses cultural consumption to demonstrate her marital status.

Parody, Fantasy, and Reality

Disney wasn't passively or innocently reflecting anything; he was actively emphasizing and exaggerating certain assumptions about women and girls while clearly ignoring others.

Susan Douglas, 1994 (31)

The initial scenes in *Enchanted* humorously exaggerate familiar tropes in Disney fairy tale films: a maiden sings joyfully to a chorus of forest animals about her one true love, the young man who tries to win her heart is brawny and brainless (a takeoff on Gaston in *Beauty and the Beast* [directed by Gary Trousdale and Kirk Wise, 1991]), a wicked witch/hag/queen intercepts the young maiden before she can marry the prince. Giselle's character is intentionally over the top, always giddy, naïve, ever so sweet. One reviewer described her as "a Strawberry Shortcake version" of a fairy tale princess (Seymour 2007). At first the movie seems to poke fun at itself and all that is Disney. Designed by director Kevin Lima as a "playful homage" and a "giant love letter to Disney classics," *Enchanted* is highly self-referential, incorporating hundreds of allusions to earlier Disney movies as well as motifs from the literary fairy tales on which they were based (especially *Snow White, Cinderella,* and *Sleeping Beauty)* (Adler 2007). Lima became obsessed with embedding Disney references in *Enchanted* through the visual imagery, plot, actors, voices, camerawork, costumes, music, dialogue, and sets (Wood 2008). Poison apples (from *Snow White)* and the "true love's

9 There has been some criticism of Ingraham's analysis for being too totalizing, including Freeman (2002) and Otnes and Pleck (2003). Yet even well-known feminist Naomi Wolf ([1995] 1999) wrestled with conventional and sexist stereotypes and cultural expectations about weddings. Sidney Eve Matrix notes the way advertising and wedding registrations give "modern I-Do Feminist brides permission to indulge in the guilty pleasures of romantic, nostalgic, fetishized housewifery" (2006, 66).

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kiss" (from *Snow White* and *Sleeping Beauty)* are just two of the more obvious examples.[10]

However, the parody suggested in the initial scenes—seemingly a good-natured spoof of the outdated gender relations represented in earlier Disney fairy tale films—dissipates soon after Giselle finds herself in New York City.[11] *Enchanted* deteriorates into a pretext for retelling the familiar narrative: a beautiful (motherless) maiden seeks her true love; she encounters trials and tribulations; a handsome young man appears; and they marry and live happily ever after.[12] *Enchanted* discards its metacommentary and is absorbed into the story line it supposedly parodies, using iconic, self-referential humor and imagery to reinforce Disney products and values. Rather than providing an alternative to the male-identified and single-minded Disney princess whose mantra is "one day my prince will come," *Enchanted* simply proves her right.

Enchanted is a romantic comedy, combining hand-drawn animation, computer-generated imagery (CGI), and live action. With thirteen minutes of animation, it is Disney's first feature-length, live-action/traditional-cell-animation hybrid since *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* (directed by Robert Zemeckis, 1988). Film critic Tim Ryan aptly described it as "sort of a *Wizard of Oz* in reverse" (2007). The first ten minutes are classic Disney animation, then the narrative switches to live action, and finally the movie ends with a short, animated scene back in Andalasia. The relationship between fantasy and reality is a prominent motif. Advertisements for *Enchanted* proclaim, "The real world and the animated world collide." While they are in New York, fairy tale characters fail to distinguish between what is real and what is fantasy: Giselle spots a big pink castle on an advertising billboard and tries to enter it; Prince Edward (James Marsden) sees a television screen and assumes it is a magic mirror. Giselle's changing appearance reveals her transition between the two realms. Her hairstyle progresses from loads of curls

10 Ardent fans have devoted Web sites to identifying all of the Disney elements from earlier films (see List of Disney References n.d.).

11 An expressive form created to comment on, mock, or poke fun at its referent, usually by means of exaggerated imitation or humor, *parody* differs from satire's sarcastic critique. Unlike satire, parody may also convey admiration for its subject. Literary theorist Linda Hutcheon comments that "parody . . . is not always at the expense of the parodied text" (2000, 7).

12 Like *Snow White, Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty,* and *The Little Mermaid, Enchanted* offers a fairy tale in the subgenre of innocent persecuted heroines, who suffer abuse and seek relief or rescue to remedy their situations (Bacchilega 1993).

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and bows to a contemporary, long, straight coiffure; her costume shifts from a fairy tale wedding dress to a sleek, modern gown.[13] Robert, the New York attorney who falls in love with Giselle, is pragmatic and disillusioned, decrying people who engage in fantasy, until she turns his world upside down and teaches him to believe in the fairy tale version of "true love." In her analysis of the seductive and omnipresent character of the "Disney spell," Justyna Deszcz argues that "the Disney fairytale is no longer confined to the sphere of the imaginary, but enjoys an alternative world, continually spilling from the fantastic fairytale realm into the real one" (2002, 83). *Enchanted* rhetorically raises the question, can a fairy tale romance survive in the real world?—and then answers with a resounding yes!

Reinscribing Disney Ideology—Enchantment or Antifeminist Backlash?

> *Perhaps this is the greatest of Disney's achievements: to render harmless that which is harmful.*
>
> Mark Axelrod, 2003 (29)

Henry Giroux suggests that Disney's strategy in cultural production involves masking its ideological constructions with claims of "innocence," rendering "it unaccountable for the diverse ways in which it shapes the sense of reality it provides for children [and adults] as they take up particular and often sanitized notions of identity, culture, and history in the seemingly apolitical cultural universe of 'the Magic Kingdom'" (1997, 56). His recent work implicates Disney in formulating notions about public life and civic responsibility:

> As citizenship becomes increasingly privatized and youth are increasingly educated to become consuming subjects rather than civic minded and critical citizens, it becomes all the more imperative for

13 Her enormous wedding gown amplifies Giselle's frivolity and femininity. The sleeves are extremely puffy to make her waist look even smaller. The skirt includes a metal hoop designed to support twenty layers of ruffles and petticoats (Kam 2007). It took more than two hundred yards of silk and satin to make each gown (the dressmakers created eleven of them for various scenes), and the finished product weighed approximately forty-five pounds (Washington 2007). "Grueling" was the word Amy Adams used to describe the experience of wearing it, noting that "the entire weight was on my hips, so occasionally it felt like I was in traction" (Murray n.d.).

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> people everywhere to develop a critical language in which notions of the public good, public issues and public life become central to overcoming the privatizing and depoliticizing language of the market. Disney, like many corporations, trades in sound bytes and the result is that the choices, exclusions and values that inform its narratives about joy, pleasure, living and existing in a global world are often difficult to discern. (2009)

Stressing the ways in which "Disney's commercial carpet bombing of children" tends to shut down popular critique and critical engagement, Giroux contends that "as one of the most influential corporations in the world, Disney does more than provide entertainment, it also shapes in very powerful ways how young people understand themselves, relate to others and experience the larger society" (Ibid.).

Thus, *Enchanted* prompts analysis of its contemporary U.S. social and historical contexts. The film was in various stages of development for ten years, most of that time concurrent with the regressive administration of U.S. President George W. Bush. In this period of rising anxiety came a push by governmental, corporate, and religious leaders to reinvigorate conservatism and return to the "traditional family values" of male dominance, female domesticity, and heteronormativity. The era was shaped by debates about the Iraq War, cuts in government spending for education and social programs, a growing divide between the rich and working classes, pervasive struggles of blended and single-parent families, attempts to legalize same-sex marriage, and debates about a white woman (Hillary Clinton) and an African American man (Barack Obama) hoping to become the next president of the United States. *Enchanted* offers a conventional, patriarchal worldview as a remedy for the alienation of modern life, providing what feminist Hortense Powdermaker, as long ago as 1950, called "filmic fantasies . . . about a peaceful and virtuous society" and, with them, the possibility for the restoration of the male-dominated, nuclear family and a resurgence of repressive gender roles (quoted in O'Brien 1996, 160).

Although the parochial worldview in Disney fairy tale films can be traced to Walt himself, the movies created by Walt Disney Studios after his death have continued to reflect his biases.[14] Numerous scholars have documented the Disney Studios' patriarchal, homophobic, and xenophobic

14 See Watts (1995) for a critical biography of Disney. See also Ayres (2003b); Bell, Haas, and Sells (1995); Eliot (1993); Giroux (1999); Grover (1991); and Smoodin (1994).

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characterizations.[15] This perspective is no accident; it is based on "conscious decisions made by management and creative forces, and influenced by social and financial contexts" (O'Brien 1996, 180). Predictably, then, conventional and mainstream Euro-North American assumptions about gender, sexuality, race, class, and culture shape *Enchanted* and influence the ways in which Walt Disney Studios formulates the fairy tale.[16]

Disney cultural expression attempts to naturalize social and political hierarchies of race (Giroux 1999, 106). *Enchanted*'s ideology endorses white privilege with its racialized use of color. Its light-equals-good versus dark-equals-bad symbolism is consistent with earlier Disney animated films (Ibid., 225).[17] The prince has blue eyes and rides a white horse; Giselle's blue eyes, fair skin, and light auburn hair contrast sharply with the black/blue costumes and makeup of the evil Narissa (Susan Sarandon). The primary characters are white. The few people of color who do appear are peripheral or secondary to the New York story line.[18] Cultural diversity and national identity are trivialized and marginalized by using racial and ethnic stereotypes. For example, Latinos appear as mariachi band members, and a black male in a Caribbean steel-drum musical group wears an African dashiki.

Enchanted further assumes a middle-to-upper-class lifestyle. Money is never an issue for any of the main characters, even those who fall through the portal into New York and somehow manage to rent hotel rooms, ride

15 See, for example, Bell, Haas, and Sells (1995); Berland (1982); Do Rozario (2004); Henke, Umble, and Smith (1996); Hoerrner (1996); Maio (1998); Mosley (1990); O'Brien (1996); and especially Haase (2004a); and Zipes (1997).

16 In this volume, Kim Snowden also draws attention to the "conventional and stereotyped idea of the way gender is constructed" and perpetuated in Disney versions of fairy tales.

17 For analyses of racism in Disney fairy tale films, see also Giroux (1997, 60–63); Macleod (2003); Robertson (1998); Wasko (2001, 139–43); and Wise (2003). Dorothy Hurley investigates the way children of color conceptualize Disney princesses and Disney's binary color symbolism (2005, 224–25). She observes, "The problem of pervasive, internalized privileging of Whiteness has been intensified by the Disney representation of fairy tale princesses which consistently reinforces an ideology of White supremacy" (Ibid., 223).

18 This selective racialization contradicts New York's own Department of City Planning, which lauds the city's "unique level of diversity: 43 percent of the city's 2.9 million foreign-born residents arrived in the U.S. in the previous ten years; 46 percent of the population speaks a language other than English at home; in just 30 years, what was primarily a European population has now become a place with no dominant race/ethnic or nationality group. Indeed, New York epitomizes the world city" (http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/html/census/nny_overview.shtml).

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ferries, and purchase food and souvenirs.[19] A diamond necklace, tiara, and earrings that Giselle wears on her wedding day symbolize her social status. Robert's young daughter, Morgan, takes a credit card from her father's dresser drawer and goes on a shopping spree with Giselle, buying bags of clothing and shoes at exclusive Manhattan boutiques. A homeless man who encounters Giselle on the streets is the only character who struggles with financial hardship. He turns out to be a thief; indifferent to her predicament of being lost in New York City, he robs her.

Heterosexuality is presumed in the narrative of *Enchanted;* viewers see no same-sex couples or alternative gender depictions. Two quick gags in the story line question if the prince and squire are gay, but viewers are quickly assured they are not.[20] When Giselle first meets a female client at the law offices where Robert is an attorney, Giselle presumes that the client is heterosexual, proclaiming, "You are beautiful. The man who holds your heart is a very lucky fellow indeed." Romance and love exist exclusively within a heterosexual framework. The narrative assumes that women are attracted to men and promotes the idea that women's problems are solved when they fall in love with men (see Stone 1985, 143). It also portrays as the norm girls and women who relish the idea of becoming socially elite and have no apparent desire to be self-sufficient.

Nancy, whose character represents the contemporary career woman, is no exception to this pattern. Even she, in the end, relinquishes her job and the real world for a fantasyland marriage in Andalasia. She exemplifies

19 Consider, in contrast, the statistics provided on the city's own Web site, estimating that 16.3 percent of New York families lived below the poverty line in 2008 (http://home2.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/census/acs_pov_stat_family_2006.pdf)

20 After Prince Edward comes through the portal onto the streets of Manhattan, his squire, Nathaniel (Timothy Spall), follows him in pursuit. Sanitation workers at the opening of the portal ask Nathaniel if he, too, is looking for a "beautiful girl," and he replies, "No, I'm looking for a prince, actually." They raise their eyebrows, assuming he is gay, and the audience laughs. In another scene, Prince Edward is searching for Giselle and knocks on the door of an apartment, thinking she is inside. A large, burly, middle-aged, white male, wearing a bandana and black leather vest, opens the door and smiles coyly, insinuating that he would be happy to have male companionship. Edward winces.

An alternative reading of Queen Narissa (Susan Sarandon) as a drag queen—in her black leather; heavy blue/purple/black eye makeup; and tall, black platform heels—is never explored in the film. She seduces the squire Nathaniel to go after Giselle, but Narissa's attraction to Nathaniel is never intended to be convincing. Though the queen is highly sexualized, the audience never sees Narissa involved in a sexual or romantic relationship.

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Enchanted's presentation of competition among women as they struggle to snare the prince. And the men for whom Nancy and Giselle vie are an insensitive hunk (the prince) and a bewildered male completely immobilized by women's liberation and changing gender roles (Robert). Consistent with Disney's worldview, both Giselle's future husband, Robert, and prospective mother-in-law, Narissa, refer to Giselle as a "girl." Of course, sexist gender roles are nothing new for Disney, but in light of the pervasive influence of feminist and other social change movements, *Enchanted* offers a distinctly anachronistic tale.

Because advertisements represented the film as a deconstruction of the traditional fairy tale, the outdated representations of gender are especially troubling. Feminist social critic Susan Faludi labels this phenomenon *backlash,* which she defines as "a powerful counter-assault on women's rights, . . . an attempt to retract the handful of small and hard-won victories that the feminist movement did manage to win for women. This counterassault is largely insidious: in a kind of pop-culture version of the Big Lie, it stands the truth boldly on its head and proclaims that the very steps that have elevated women's position have actually led to their downfall" (1991, xviii). Faludi's concept exemplifies the ways in which the main characters in *Enchanted* perform gender, revealing an underlying ideology that is sexist and patriarchal.

Gender stereotypes reach beyond the main character, Giselle, or her age mate and rival, Nancy. In a glamorous version of *Sleeping Beauty*'s Maleficent or Cruella De Vil in *101 Dalmatians* (directed by Stephen Herek, 1996), Susan Sarandon's performance as Queen Narissa—powerful, seductive, slinky, conniving, and sexual—provides a sharp contrast to Amy Adams's Giselle. Narissa, who is Prince Edward's stepmother, is depicted as reptilian by her costumes (scales on a long, slinky, black dress and cape), dialogue (Prince Edward refers to her as "you viper!"), and mannerisms (flicking her tongue). In the finale, this characterization is confirmed when she turns into a dragon. However, despite her cunning and power, even she is vulnerable, dependent on men for her status and survival. For reasons never explained to the viewer, Narissa believes that Prince Edward's future marriage will endanger her claim to the throne. She thus sees Giselle as a threat, and the primary tension in the plot revolves around one woman trying to eliminate the other.

Twice during her efforts to get rid of her competition, Narissa transforms into an old and disfigured hag or witch, the opposite of the lovely Giselle.

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In this guise, she fits the profile of Disney's female villains as Laura Sells observes: "Within Disney's patriarchal ideology, any woman with power has to be represented as a castrating bitch" (1995, 181). While the king is absent (he is never mentioned in the story), Narissa struggles for legitimacy.[21] The crone versus the virgin, she sees Giselle solely as a competitor for social position and male validation. Thus, for Giselle to find fulfillment, she must kill her prospective mother-in-law—the only untamed, liberated female character in the story.[22] Indeed, to fulfill this symbolic requirement, the story line requires the audience to suspend its need for consistency within the plot. After Giselle pursues her to the top of the Woolworth Building, Narissa falls to her death on the streets below. Given her prodigious magical powers, why can't she save herself? The possibility of Narissa's survival is never explored because it would undermine the younger-innocent-woman-kills-older-wicked-woman motif.

Giselle is Narissa's opposite. Sweet, trustworthy, cheerful, caring, and selfless, she has never experienced anger before she arrives in the real world. She is simple minded and seems to lack any critical sensibility about what she encounters. After Giselle is pushed through the portal, she makes no attempt to return but instead passively waits for the prince to rescue her. She is lost—literally and metaphorically—and the only way she thinks she can get home is for the prince to come and get her. Like other recent Disney female protagonists (including Ariel, Belle, Jasmine, and Pocahontas), Giselle is simultaneously innocent and sexualized. Rebecca-Anne Do Rozario observes this dynamic in the portrayal of earlier Disney princesses: "The sexuality of the princess appears incongruous in features deemed suitable for young children, but the princesses of Team Disney [Eisner era], including Ariel, Jasmine, and Pocahontas, have all been read through sexual thematics" (2004, 51). While they are both getting a makeover at a beauty salon, Morgan tells Giselle that "boys are only interested in one thing." When Giselle looks puzzled and asks Morgan what that means, she confesses that she has no idea, and both females acknowledge their ignorance about sex.

However, mixed messages abound: the plunging necklines of Giselle's dresses are cut low and tight, revealing bare shoulders and cleavage. While Giselle is in Robert's apartment, he accidentally walks into the bathroom as

21 See Craven (2002, 128) for a discussion of the struggles of Disney heroines.

22 Narissa is also a stepmother; see Axelrod (2003) and Haas (1995) for discussions of representations of these figures in Disney films.

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she is taking a shower. She is nude but undaunted by his presence. During the resulting confusion, Robert and Giselle trip over one another and fall to the floor while Giselle is wearing nothing but a towel. Robert's partner, Nancy, walks in and sees them, then storms out of the apartment, assuming they are having an affair. Giselle is mystified by Nancy's reaction. The dynamic changes toward the end of the movie, when Giselle first experiences sexual desire. She wears a pair of men's blue pajamas; Robert seems to be wearing nothing under his bathrobe, suggesting he has given his pajamas to Giselle. She touches his bare chest, and they stop just short of acting upon this moment of intimacy.

Giselle's other female counterpart, Nancy, Robert's partner, is portrayed as an outspoken, "modern" woman. Yet she has nonetheless been waiting five years for Robert to propose to her, evidently unable to take the initiative herself. She is a savvy entrepreneur who runs her own business—Nancy Tremaine's Design Studio—and the dialogue suggests that she and Robert have a sexual relationship. In a scene that producers later cut, Nancy tells a coworker, "It's not like I'm one of those women, you know, who sit around their entire lives waiting for some perfect prince in shining armor to take me off to his castle in the Hamptons. I got over that fantasy a long time ago" *(Enchanted* DVD 2008). Perhaps the dialogue was removed because viewers soon learn this isn't true; what Nancy really wants is to be "swept off her feet" by her Prince Charming.

Loving the romance of it all, she is ecstatic when Robert uncharacteristically invites her to the Kings and Queens Costume Ball. When Giselle and Robert fall in love, Nancy quickly abandons her cosmopolitan sensibilities by jumping through the portal back to Andalasia with Prince Edward, marrying him, and literally turning into a two-dimensional character. During the animated wedding ceremony at the end of the film, Nancy's cell phone rings. She giggles, snatches the phone, and throws it to the ground, where it shatters, symbolically leaving behind her modern life. When the Andalasian priest declares Prince Edward and Nancy "husband and wife," Nancy upends convention, taking the lead and tilting Edward backward to deliver a powerful kiss. However, she has left her life as a cosmopolitan businesswoman behind, preferring to marry the shallow and half-witted prince. Nancy becomes the princess she (and, by inference, other women who profess independence) really wants to be. Like many female characters in Disney tales once they find their true loves, Nancy loses her "mildly feminist attributes" to become "merely [a] blushing bride" (Bean 2003, 58).

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Faux Feminism: Disney's Response to the Women's Movement

In a scene from *Enchanted,* while rushing into the lobby of the Time Warner Center in Manhattan, Giselle and Robert pass Fernando Botero's twenty-foot nude statue entitled *Eve.* The figure is dark brown and rotund, with enormous hips and thighs. Giselle, taken with the sculpture, pauses and exclaims in a sweet voice, "She's beautiful!" Annoyed with Giselle's delays, Robert replies, "She's fat." Given the very-white-and-very-slender appearance of all the female lead characters, Giselle's comment creates a kind of cognitive dissonance. The only woman in the film who looks anything like the statue is a bus driver. She is overweight, loud, aggressive, and speaks in black vernacular; her character perpetuates stereotypes about African American women, and the portrayal is anything but flattering.

Feminism seeks to disrupt conventional masculine/feminine polarities, see other positions and identifications, and raise significant questions about issues of power and privilege, not only with regard to gender and sexuality but also race, ethnicity, class, culture, dis/ability, religion, and nationality. And indeed, as Giselle struggles to become a three-dimensional character in the real world, she begins to think (however minimally) for the first time, questioning—if only in a superficial way—the narrowly defined script for her life in Andalasia. In the process of her transformation, however, she also loses her own voice, no longer singing the songs that signal plot development. Prior to falling in love with Robert, Giselle sings about her life and dreams. Robert instructs her to stop singing in public because she embarrasses him. When the prince finally locates Giselle in New York and starts singing to her, she can no longer think of lyrics to sing back to him. Beginning at the Kings and Queens Costume Ball, other characters sing the tunes that structure the story line: a male soloist takes the spotlight, vocalizing "So Close," the song that brings Giselle and Robert together.[23] Giselle literally gives up her singing voice to find love, much as Ariel does in *The Little Mermaid.*

23 Vocalist Jon McLaughlin performs "So Close" while Giselle and Robert share an intimate dance and finally recognize they are in love. With music composed by Alan Menken and lyrics by Stephen Schwartz, the number was nominated for best original song at the eightieth Academy Awards. At the end of the movie, Carrie Underwood sings "Ever Ever After," the only original number in the film not sung by someone on-screen.

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The characterization of Morgan, Robert's young daughter, is one of the most disturbing aspects of *Enchanted,* however. Robert wants Morgan to be able to protect herself (he insists she take karate lessons), read a book entitled *Important Women of Our Time* (she grimaces and protests), and, as he says, "face the world for what it is." Yet his daughter really wants to be a princess, symbolized by the pink crown on her bedroom door, her princess canopy bed, her adoration of Giselle, and her fondness for wearing pink and princess/fairy costumes. Morgan doesn't like Nancy—the take-charge, assertive woman—preferring Giselle's princess wardrobe and focus on romance. Early in the story, Robert tells Morgan that Nancy is "a lot like the women in your book" and that, when they marry, Nancy will move in the apartment and become Morgan's new mother. "You mean *step*mother," Morgan replies, her correction reminding viewers that stepmothers are bad news in Disney fairy tales (see Axelrod 2003; Haas 1995; Tatar 1985).[24]

Giselle stays in New York and marries Robert. In one of the final scenes, a group of girls gathers excitedly in Giselle's new business, Andalasia Fashions (which seems to have replaced Nancy's design studio). Presaging what we witnessed at "Disney's *Enchanted* Experience," with which we opened this chapter, the girls are dressed in pink and pastel princess and fairy costumes, excitedly exploring Giselle's latest designs and thereby ensuring the perpetuation of princess culture by the next generation of consumers. Disney's portrayal of Morgan—her love of all things princess, along with her rejection of Nancy—represents her antifeminist, backlash response to societal changes and the progress women have made in changing sexist gender roles. Through Morgan, *Enchanted* sends a clear message that feminism is not what girls really want, and it isn't going to make them happy. Voiced by a young female, this commentary signals the audience that "imposing" feminism on girls is harmful because it goes against their allegedly natural desires.

Giroux observes and critiques the pedagogical function that Disney movies serve especially for children, noting that "the significance of animated films operates on many registers, but one of the most persuasive is the role they play as the new 'teaching machines,' as producers of culture. I soon found out that that for my children, and I suspect for many others,

24 Christy Williams notes in her chapter in this collection that in *Ever After* (not a Disney film), the stepmother similarly "acts as a female agent of patriarchy, ensuring that male ideals of gender behavior and hierarchy are not solely perpetuated through male figures."

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these films appear to inspire at least as much cultural authority as the public schools, religious institutions, and the family" (1997, 53). Princesses are big moneymakers for Disney, but their promotion does much more than generate a profit. It also inculcates archaic, patriarchal ideologies in each successive wave of children and reinforces oppressive value systems in older generations. Consumers are encouraged to internalize the messages about social relations, love, and power that are embedded in Disney fairy tale films. Writing about the potentially disturbing impact of princess culture, Meline Toumani described how a friend's daughters tried to convince their mother to let them wear their princess costumes over their pajamas so they wouldn't need to take them off when they went to bed. She comments that "the weirdest thing about the Princess craze is that it doesn't simply involve owning the same item that all the other kids have: it involves *becoming the character yourself,* a level of identification and involvement that deserves scrutiny for sure" (2007; emphasis added).

In response to social pressure, Disney has made a minimal effort in the recent past to incorporate moderately feminist elements into its fairy tale films, but these can be more accurately described as "faux feminism."[25] Usually this impulse involves trivializing feminist ideology or compressing the actions of female characters into the conventions of popular romance while maintaining that they are her choice, not actions instilled by patriarchal teaching and values. In her study of *Beauty and the Beast*, Allison Craven traces the way that Disney's version twists the older tale from a focus on Beauty's learning and understanding to falling in love. Citing the "domesticating effects of Disney's feminism on its heroines," she demonstrates the way that Disney films sometimes inject elements of self-determination or empowerment into the portrayal of female protagonists, only to undermine them with narrative conclusions that inevitably equate the heroine's fulfillment with heterosexual romance and marriage (2002, 126). She observes that—even when female protagonists are feisty or clever—their moments of agency reflect a "carefully scripted concept of pop femininity, constructed to be acceptable and entertaining to both children and adults" (Ibid., 130).

25 In *Feminism Is for Everybody,* for example, bell hooks critiques faux feminism or what she calls "lifestyle feminism": the idea that any perspective—no matter how damaging to women—can be part of a feminism that is individually, and individualistically, defined. She concludes, for example, that "one cannot be anti-choice and be feminist" (2000, 6).

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Enchanted follows this pattern of faux feminism, in which fragments of feminist ideas are trivialized or subsumed within a dominant discourse of traditional gender roles (O'Brien 1996, 180). For example, Giselle demonstrates her resourcefulness by making a dress out of curtains in Robert's apartment.[26] However, her actions also reinforce her allegiance to domesticity and self-beautification: for example, using her creativity to make clothing, rather than find a way out of her dilemma. Giselle's gradual movement toward self-realization (by beginning to think for herself, recognizing she loves Robert rather than Prince Edward, assuming the role of warrior in her pursuit of the dragon, and starting her own business) is undermined by the narrative that ultimately defines her in relationship to a man. Although she lectures others about the depths and dimensions of love, her own focus is superficial. When Prince Edward finally finds her, Giselle's question is, "How do I look?" Robert's response, "Beautiful!" reaffirms that her appearance is what's important. Like the antifeminist postfeminism discussed by Kim Snowden in her chapter in this volume, *Enchanted* contends that women can have it all, so long as they do it within the roles of wife and mother in a nuclear family. Alternatively, we imagine Giselle coming to consciousness and starting a life of her own without being defined as a wife and mother. She could develop a critical sensibility about Robert, his cynicism, and his fear of commitment. She could encourage Morgan to read that book about women who have changed the world.

Marina Warner argues that the Disney version of fairy tales represents, above all, "Hollywood's cunning domestication of feminism itself" (1994, 313). In the end, *Enchanted* reinforces conformity to a nostalgic view of social and gender relations.[27] Characters who conform to heteronormative, racist, classist, and sexist ideals find themselves safe and happy. Personal growth remains minimal and superficial with social or political change

26 Here the filmmakers reference Julie Andrews, who played the main character in *The Sound of Music* (directed by Robert Wise, 1965) and is the narrator in *Enchanted*. Andrews's character also makes clothing out of curtains in *The Sound of Music.* In another homage, Giselle's song in Central Park, "That's How You Know," imitates Andrews as she runs over the top of a hill, singing "The Sound of Music."

27 Much like our interpretation of *Enchanted,* Williams in her chapter suggests that "the fragments of the 'Cinderella' tale that are manipulated most consistently in *Ever After*—the phrase 'once upon a time,' the dress, the rescue, and the godmother—placate a late-twentieth- and early-twenty-first-century audience's expectations of popular feminism but fail to move the 'Cinderella' story beyond the structural misogyny knit into the tale's plot."

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precluded. Brenda Ayres aptly describes the continuing Disney agenda: "It is that Midwestern image—white, middle class, all-American, apple pie, Bible on the coffee table, anti-intellectual, heterosexual nuclear family—that has come to form the Disney ideal. Disney products colonize generations of children and parents to embrace this ideal and to regard divergence as inferior or evil. The Disneyfication of our children, then, is empire building, complete with an imperialistic colonizing force that effects either conformity to the ideal or denigration of the Other" (2003a, 16–17).

Of course, not all viewers happily accept the cultural narratives that Disney presents. Some voice their objections. To an online debate about gender roles in Disney fairy tale films, one blogger wrote, "And why does Disney feel such a need lately to show gutsy women who nonetheless are always needing to be rescued? Seems like they're trying to have things both ways—a strong heroine who really doesn't undermine the status quo. Grr. Argh" (e-mail posted by Erica Carlson, May 28, 2004, under Disney Movies vs Fairy Tales, SurLaLune fairytales.com). But perhaps the most urgent question is why contemporary audiences, particularly women, continue to support and promote the consumption of Disney fairy tale films.[28] Many who attended the Hollywood premiere of *Enchanted* were young mothers, who brought their children to view the movie. Afterward parents smiled and sometimes prodded their daughters—many of them wearing princess costumes—to stand alongside the Disney princesses. Women—who may know on an experiential level that Prince Charming and Disney's notion of happily-ever-after are fictions that do not elucidate or reflect their life experiences—clearly buy princess merchandise for their daughters and may even encourage them to pretend they will become princesses one day. To what degree do consumerism and cultural capitalism affect viewers' reception of Disney fairy tale films, and how does the "enchantment" of Disney ideology effectively "seduce its audience into suspending critical judgment on the messages produced by such films" (Giroux 1997, 58)?

Princesses and Disney's sexist ideology sell, and the Disney worldview is integral to the marketing of its products. Pamela Colby O'Brien observes, "As long as audiences approve of Disney's films and characters, the company has little incentive to reevaluate Walt's formula" (1996, 181). Disney's effective marketing to children means that mothers and families—even if they themselves disavow the films' and products' consumerist, heteronormative,

28 For a fuller discussion of this question, see Hines and Ayres (2003).

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racist, and sexist messages—may feel that they cannot prevent their children becoming cultural consumers of Disney films.[29] Since economic profit remains central to Disney, its someday-my-prince-will-come formula is unlikely to change until more audience members object and are willing to signal their disapproval by altering their patterns of cultural consumption and choosing not to support the continuing production of patriarchal fairy tale films.

29 Thanks to Jack Zipes for this insight.

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